

Revelation 4

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[0 : 00] Today's scripture reading can be found in Revelation chapter 4, verses 1 through 11. That can be found on page 1030 on the Blue Bibles provided for you.

Again, that's Revelation chapter 4, beginning in verse 1. After this I looked, and behold, a door... I'm sorry, please rise with me. After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of Jasper and Carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

[1 : 05] From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumbles and peals of thunder. And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

The first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within. And day and night they never cease to say, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who was seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who was seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

[2 : 14] They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good afternoon to you.

When we come to this passage of Scripture, it seems like one of the appropriate things that we might do is to remove our shoes.

Because we come to a great picture that helps us to see the glory of God and gain a better understanding of who he is.

Dave and I, as you've observed, have been alternating. This is a two-week in a row for me because as we got to Revelation chapters 4 and 5, we just about could have flipped a coin, but he had done five and I had done some work on four, so I ended up with this great passage this afternoon.

[3 : 36] And I would pray that in some way that the Lord would communicate through me just the richness of this particular text.

I pray that you would join me in prayer to that end. Lord, we love you. We thank you and we are humbled before you this afternoon.

Lord, as we come in Scripture to the very throne room of God, control center of the universe, and pray, Lord, that you would give us a glimpse of yourself.

May we, in ways that fit your purposes, understand what's here, but also the implications of what these things mean for us today.

We beseech you for your help and for your enablement to that end. And pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. John's first vision came in Revelation chapter 1.

[4 : 47] He beheld the resurrected Christ in glory, the glorified Christ in the midst of his church. We saw in chapters 2 and 3 that the churches were in fact judged by the one who said, I know your works.

We saw that refrain repeated again and again as a reminder that the living God, the glorified Christ, knows his church.

In view of his knowledge, words of either commendation or correction were forthcoming to the various churches there in Asia Minor in 1st century A.D.

Along with those words came prescriptions, God's formula or his prescriptions for the wholeness of the churches, their usefulness and effectiveness.

Because God wants his church well. He wants his church whole. He wants to use his church in the world as light bearers to the nations.

[6 : 03] That has been his plan. Not simply in a local setting, but God wants his glory to be seen and to be made known among the nations.

Missions, one definition of missions, is going global with the gospel. And we want to see the nations bow and sing the praises of the living God.

Even as we've seen these creatures, these angelic beings in heaven giving praise to God on the basis of his worth.

The words of Christ also included a warning to his church to hear what the Spirit of God was saying to his church in that day.

And similarly, you and I do well to listen to the Lord, of course, through his word, but in ways that befit our contemporary situation and all that you and I face.

[7 : 09] The various challenges that fit our day and those challenges that have your name and my name on them. You know that's true. You have challenges and let's call them issues with your name on it in our own day and time.

Textually, look at chapter 3, verse 21. Textually, we are prepared prepared to go into chapter 4 by what we see in chapter 3, verse 21.

Look at what he says. The one, to the one, the one who conquers, I will grant him, notice what he says, to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne. So right there at the end of chapter 3, we are somewhat prepared textually and using the same word that we see very prominent in chapter 4.

One of the things that we are quick to observe in Revelation chapter 4, that we're no longer dealing with an imperfect church in an imperfect world.

[8 : 25] With John, we are ushered into the very throne room of the universe. The glory and the beauty that we see in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 and they go together.

It's contrast with what we see, what John saw then and, brothers and sisters, what you and I see in our world today.

Yesterday's graduation at Northern Illinois University was a reminder of the horrible events that happened there just a few months ago. A troubled young man took the lives of five fellow students and wounded others, huh?

And then turned the gun on himself and killed himself. That's what you call ugly. The rash of killings on Chicago's south side, the Tindley Park murders, and these are just the local scene.

That's what you call ugly. The economic pain felt by many, the pain at the pump that every time you and I go there, I don't let my, I try not to let my tank go under half these days.

[9 : 43] I know it's psychological, but it's sure nice to put \$30 in better than \$50, huh? nationally, the elections on all of our mind, and that, in many cases, has been ugly.

And who knows what the end is going to be. Some of us may be wringing our hands and a little nervous because we don't know what the end is going to be.

We don't know if there's going to be a Republican or a Democrat or a man or a woman or a black or a white.

God knows, doesn't he? Nationally, tornadoes. I mean, as you look about the things that have sort of worked their way through our nation and in the world, national disaster as far as the weather-wise, and then the earthquake in China, tens of thousands of lives, the cyclone in Myanmar, tens of thousands of lives.

Chaos seems to reign in our world. And that's not even bringing it down personally.

[11 : 19] As you look at the landscape of your own life and the ache and the pain and the questions that you and I bring every day that we wake up and sometimes seemingly staring us right in the face.

What we see in Revelation chapter 4 can help to counter the chaos that we see in our world and in our lives. Here, once again, you and I are reminded that the creator of all rules over all. And he has a plan as well as a person through whom he will reclaim absolutely everything that is his own.

And as we make our way through Revelation chapter 4, we're going to see those things unfold. Through the rest of Revelation, to see those things unfold.

And here it is that you and I get a behind-the-scenes look at the Most High who rules over all. You may never get a chance to see what goes on in the halls and the corridors of power of this world.

[12 : 47] But you and I get a glimpse into the very throne room of God where the Most High rules and from which he rules.

We see his glory. We see his character. We get to see his attributes. They are firm. And because of these things, friend, so you and I can take fresh courage in our chaotic world.

So we see the invitation. Look at chapter 4. We're in the seasons of invitations, aren't we? Some of you have got them for graduations.

Weddings. You get them. This is not an invite or an email or a smell mail invitation. And John received it.

It was personal. John, we see here, he looked and behold, a door was standing open in heaven.

And just like open doors don't necessarily mean that you enter, John received an invitation to enter this door.

[13 : 53] He hears this trumpet sounding voice like as he had heard in chapter 1. And he hears that voice saying, come up here and I will show you what must take place after this.

Look at there. He said, after this, this means after the completion, the first after this in the first part of the verse, means after the completion of the first vision. The door opened signified that John was going to be given access into heaven, getting a glimpse of things to come.

Perhaps even some of those things were already in play, but his first glimpse would be of the eternal one who held past, present, and future in his hands. notice in verse 2 that John was under the influence of the Spirit of God.

And as Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 6 and Ezekiel chapter 1, the hand of God was upon him. John, Revelation has been called a prophetic letter.

And John was in fact a prophet. He was a prophet in kind with Old Testament prophets. prophets. And he had experiences comparable to those Old Testament prophets.

[15 : 08] As a matter of fact, we need to go to Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 1. Turn with me there to page 571 in your Bible. This is a well known chapter, particularly because of what we see in verses 1 through 5, which we will read.

It was Isaiah's vision, his peering into the same heaven that John looked into in Revelation chapter 4.

After we look to this, we will go to Ezekiel and we'll see a similar experience that he had. But notice in Isaiah, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord and notice he was sitting where?

Upon a throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim.

Each had six wings, with two he covered his face and with two he covered his feet and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

[16 : 31] The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And notice Isaiah's words, woe is me, for I am lost.

I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. It was like he took off his shoes.

His words speak about his humility before the awesome God. Turn over to Ezekiel chapter 1. That would be on page 692.

I want to read several portions from there because there are some things that parallel what we see in Revelation chapter 4. Notice chapter 1, verse 1, in the 30th year, the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Kibar Canal, the heavens were open, and I saw

visions of God.

On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin. The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans, by the Kibar Canal, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

[18:03] You go on down and notice the header in the ESV, it speaks about the glory of the Lord. Let me just highlight a few things about that. Look at verse 13. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures.

And the fire was bright, and out of the fire came forth lightning. Look at verse 26. Above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne in appearance like sapphire, and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.

Again, he's looking into heaven. He sees these angelic kind of creatures, and then he sees the throne. Look at verse 28.

The appearance of the bold that was in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I saw the voice of one, I heard the voice of one speaking.

[19:16] Chapter 2, verse 1, and he said to me, Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. And as he spoke to me, the spirit entered unto me, and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

Back to Revelation chapter 4. 4, God's throne alone, we see in chapter 4.

As a matter of fact, look at them. Verse 2, a throne stood, one seated on the throne, also in verse 2. Look, it speaks about around the throne in verse 3, around the throne in verse 4, from the throne in verse 5, before the throne in verse 5, and you can see that all the!

way to the! John's entry was not into the stately palaces where men dwell, where decisions and decrees are made on an earthly human level.

Here was the command center of the universe, the place from which the eternal decrees of God were made. The decision to create, to allow the fall, to erect, to effect rescue and redemption.

[21:09] This was the place. This was the throne room that he was in. The place from which these decrees are made. Some of you have gone to the centers of power of this world.

You've been to Capitol Hill and the wonderful places that are there where history altering decisions have been made. But John's invitation was to the control center of the universe, the place from which the sovereign God rules.

Heaven is my throne, he has declared in Isaiah 66. Let me give you three things to hang your hat on as we move through several observations, three throne room observations that I want to make. first concerns the one seated on the throne, the second concerning the mysterious attendance around the throne, and finally the worship before the throne of God.

Look there, we see him, there was one seated on the throne, verse two, and then he proceeds as best as he could with human language to describe the one that was on the throne.

[22:28] Have you ever faced something that was difficult to describe with words? It's somewhat indescribable. Well, John was faced with the same thing.

Here he uses the choices jewels of earth are used to describe the glory of God in heaven. He speaks of superlative kinds of things, things of inestimable worth.

Precious stones of earth are used to describe the brilliance of the one who sits on the throne. Here was a dazzling display of multicolored majestic glory.

Beauty and glory beyond description. One color alone was inadequate. The stones that reflected various kinds of colors.

Jasper was diamond like in its beauty. Cornelian or sardius was a hard reddish translucent kind of semi precious stone. And then you see the rainbow there in verse five.

[23:33] Probably a reminder of God's covenant with the earth that he would not destroy it by water anymore. But it was a cool green kind of color.

And then there before him was this sea of glass crystal. So just imagine Spielberg can't duplicate this. I mean the greatest of the greatest can't reproduce this.

Absolute dazzling glory. It's compounded by that. then the peals of thunder remind us of when Moses ascended in Exodus chapter 19 and the display of God's glory was there on Mount Sinai.

Similar phenomena were indications of the divine presence and we've already read one of those in Ezekiel chapter 1 and verse 13. Before the throne was this sea of glass like crystal and can you just imagine the effects of what was going on there?

This dazzling display of glory that proceeded from the one who was on the throne. Inexpressible unspeakable the throne from which God reigned psalm speaks of his throne in several ways 9 chapter 9 and verse 7 but the Lord sits in throne forever he has established his throne for justice 11 and 4 says the Lord is in his holy temple the Lord's throne is in heaven his eyes see his eyelids test the children of men and then Psalm 45 which is quoted in Hebrews 1 your throne oh God speaking of Christ is forever and ever 93 and 2 your throne is established of all you are everlasting there's one seated on the throne wow just think of what

[25 : 48] John's readers perhaps may have thought when they saw this this was not Domitian who was sitting on the throne the emperor of Rome at that time this is not George W.

Bush in the Oval Office or other kinds of rulers that may cause us a measure of fear and trepidation the living God was on his throne and rather causing fear that she calls us to take fresh courage to give comfort to you and me what about the mysterious attendance around the throne wouldn't it have been nice for John to have given us a footnote and said this is really what you're dealing with here when you talk about these 24 elders and these four living creatures there are two groups of attendance you see the first in chapter four around the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the thrones were 24 elders and then you see in chapter six

I mean verse six around the throne on each side of the throne are four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind question who are they well you may be pleased to know that one source says there are at least 13 different views as to their identity probably more we're not going to go through 13 I don't think it's necessary to go through them but the information that we have should be a clue to their identity as far as they're seated on 24 thrones they are clothed in white garments and they have other there's another indication of some kind of royalty and that they have crowns some see the elders as representing the church in heaven others the redeemed of the ages to include Old Testament believers there are excellent Bible expositors who see them these elders as angelic representatives of all the people of God the redeemed but I believe that an equally strong view allows us to see these elders in a slightly different light it goes something like this the throne room is the place from which God exercises his rule over the world and therefore there are some who see these elders as angelic beings who compose the divine council made up of rulers through whom God exercises his rule another would put it this way the elders are a class of heavenly spirit beings belonging to the general class of angels and living creatures now let's unpack that just a little bit so we just don't throw it out there without some good kind of foundation first of all look at their number again there are 24 of them and this seems to indicate that they have some kind of ruling function as a matter of fact

I need some math help here of course we know that 12 times 2 is 24 and in the Bible 12 seems to be the number of divine government 12 months in a lunar year 12 tribes of Israel 12 apostles 12 gates in the city of Jerusalem 12 angels at each gate 12 foundations 12 thousand seal from each tribe again it seems to indicate a number that deals with government notice also their adornment what they have on white clothes and golden crowns speak of the royal dignity of those who are so closely associated with the throne of God now let me give you a couple of scriptures that may help to help you to see the rationale in this particular view turn to

[30 : 34] Isaiah chapter 24 and verse 23 that's on page 585 then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed for the Lord of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and his glory will be before whom his elders okay his elders turn at page 744 to Daniel chapter 7 and verse 9 and again Daniel gets a glimpse into the heavenlies and he sees this scene and not only does he see the ancient of days but there are other heavenly attendants that are there and notice he says as

I look what thrones are placed and the ancient of days took his seat his clothing was as white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool his throne was fiery flames its wheels were burning fire again the whole idea of elders and thrones but then let's let Paul speak in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 10 on page 977 Ephesians chapter 3 verse 10 and of course Ephesians it speaks about I mean in the heavenlies in chapter 1 the heavenlies in chapter 6 but also the glorious things that God has done in and through Christ will be placarded before heavenly authorities angelic beings look at verse 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of

God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places so again these seem to be I see a very good argument for these being angelic beings who compose the divine council of rulers through whom God exercised his rule what about the four living creatures the second group there and back to revelation chapter four so we see then that the 24 elders are not alone around the throne the other group uniquely positioned in the center and around the throne you might say these are an inner circle of angelic beings before God they're different in appearance you see there they're like a lion and like a calf the facial appearance of a man like an eagle in flight they are alike in that they are all head wings they're full of eyes they cease not to praise

God they have characteristics of two angelic orders the cherubim and the seraphim and it seems like these are heavenly creatures of the highest order involved in the worship of God in heaven as well as fulfilling God's purposes on earth we're going to see we move through particularly we'll begin to see them again in Revelation chapter 6 the four in numbers seems to relate them to the earth it seems that these are an angelic order that represents all of created order before the throne of God here in heaven creation is represented before the very throne of God the nearness to the throne hints at their most important position these are the central worshipers of God their eyes speak about their comprehensive knowledge that reflects or mirrors but does not match the knowledge of

God who knows all things they're God centered we see that in their praises who are these two mysterious groups in the throne room seems to be a safe conclusion that they're angelic beings appointed for the praise of God in heaven and for serving his purposes in the universe we move quickly to worship activity before the throne first of all we notice there are two songs here two great songs on the basis of proximity knowledge of God and the experience of God the first one is a celebration of God's person the second song is a celebration of God's works for leaving creatures they offer their praise to the one on the throne in acknowledgement of his holiness it speaks of his incomparable majesty his otherness God is in a class of one absolute speaks of his absolute moral worth and value and here that attribute is celebrated here in a significant kind of way not just holy holy but holy holy holy huh it's emphasized and students of scripture of course hear the echo of [36 : 22] Isaiah 6 that we've already read here in Revelation 4 so here it was against the political climate and the dominance of Roman power the Lord God who occupied the throne was the true ruler overall as you look at he is the Lord God almighty he was the one who was and is and not only that the one who was coming and we're going to in Revelation we're going to see his coming to reclaim that which is his he's going to judge but he's also going to redeem huh celebration of his works we see that hymn in verse 11 huh it speaks!

about the Lord God as creator and what a wonderful compliment to this sermon today from our children all creatures of our God and King huh the first word notice the first word in the song worthy are you worthy is a very interesting word it speaks of the weight or the worth of people or their deeds it comes from a word that means drawing down the scale and if you're like me in this time of year coming out of winter you know something about drawing down the scale when you step on it you've got some winter girth and you draw down the scale huh so equal weight will draw down the scale to balance but something heavier tips the scale there's some of you perhaps are hoping that your university degree will tip the scale in your favor that somebody wants a heavy weight just like you huh in their employ huh but picture that you know you want someone that is of worth weighty huh there are several things that go on the scale in the text glory and honor and power and the god who occupied the throne was heavy enough to draw down the scale and that he's worthy of it all huh it was his by reason of his role as creator and they belong to him like none other the glory! and the honor and praise belong to him he is! huh and we think of Philippians chapter 2 where it speaks about all of created order every knee is going to bow every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father because he is worthy huh Colossians 1 16 speaks about him and his creative role for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible where the thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things are created through him and for him this is the God that was being celebrated there what are the implications for you and me as we are faced with things in our broken world the Lord counters the ugly of the world with the beauty of who he is glimpses of things to come biblical prophecy had a way of warning the wicked of the judgment but also reminding the righteous of a future day which things were going to change the message sent during those challenging times what he's saying is this there is brothers and sisters more to see than you and

I can see with the naked eye there is a God who rules over all and has all things at his disposal to do whatever he wills to do in this world the triumph of ugly and the prevalence of these chaotic kinds of things they do have an end thus you and I can take courage in that the one who has created the world is ultimately the one who is in control of the world and even when it seems like things are out of control the one who occupies the throne is in control the psalmist put it this way the Lord lives and blessed be the rock and may the God of my salvation be exalted he reigns let the people tremble he sits enthroned upon the cherubim let the earthquake the implications for our comfort and our courage as we see this particular picture but also their implications for our worship picture yourself sitting in a first century assembly and hearing these words for the first time and you hear about heaven being open does that spark praise and worship comparable to what you see here from these created beings in heaven revelation chapter 19 verse 6 says

John writes then I heard what seemed to be a voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder crying out hallelujah for the Lord our God our the Lord our God the almighty he reigns hallelujah because he reigns and he rules and he will bring things to a God appointed in but there's one more thing that we need to do in view of this you and I need to run to the throne we need to run to the throne God's throne that we see here while being a throne of judgment is also a throne of grace and of mercy this has implications for our prayers in our time of need the writer of Hebrews put it this way let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that you and

[42 : 55] I may obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need implications for our prayers and that you and I should not hesitate to come to the throne but you and I should be motivated to go to the throne in our time of need this is the God that we can come to as pictured here beautifully marvelously wonderfully in indescribable ways we're going to sing now Sarah is going to come and she's going to sing the song through the first time listen to it then I'm going to invite you to rise to your feet and join in this song of worship and of praise and may you be encouraged today to take fresh courage and to worship the

God that we see here and to run to him in your time of need to to to to!